

APPLICABILITY OF E-CHOUPAL BY FARMERS OF GONDA DISTRICT IN UTTAR PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

In the present era, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have deeper impact on farming community and help in providing information in all spheres of agriculture and allied sectors. The ways to which it is utilised by different farmers are varied. The study was conducted in Gonda district of Uttar Pradesh to know the pattern of use of e-Choupal by the farmers. A total of 120 farmers were selected as a study sample. Structured pre-tested interview schedule was used for data collection. For data analysis mean, frequency and percentage were used. The findings revealed that majority of the farmers (89.16%) were aware of purchase of farmers produce (at e-Choupal), 39.16 per cent farmers stated that they got information twice in last three months and 66.66 per cent respondents perceived that the services of e-Choupal are moderately credible. The findings revealed that the service 'purchase of agri-produce' had maximum users (47.50%) followed by 'best practices' being used by 32.50 per cent respondents, 49.16 per cent respondents were highly satisfied with the services and 83.33 per cent respondent had found it effective.

KEYWORDS: Pattern of Use, E-Choupal, Services, Farmers

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INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, traditional media such as fair, has been the source to learn, earn, participate and share information vis-à-vis farmers' life (Lal et al. 2016). This was due to its rustic charm to attract the mankind for the centuries (Lal et al. 2015). But, emergence of ICT has revolutionized the agriculture and allied fields vis-à-vis farmers' life, it helped in generating new market, transforming the structure of the distribution channels and all processes. ICT played an important role in information exchange among farmers. It has been identified that agriculture as one of the important area in which ICT can play a significant role (Raksha and Meera, 2015).

The e-Choupal is an initiative of ITC Limited, a conglomerate in India, launched in Hoshangabad district of Madhya Pradesh in June 2000 to link directly with rural farmers via the internet for procurement of agricultural and aquaculture products. The initiative aims to empower the Indian farmers through information and knowledge dissemination on improved agricultural practices and price discovery for effective decision-making (Olaniyi, 2013). ITC Limited has provided computers and internet access in rural areas across several agricultural regions of the country, where the farmers can directly negotiate and sale their produce with ITC Limited. Online access through e-Choupal enables farmers to obtain information about mandi prices, weather forecasts and good

farming practices, besides placing orders for quality agricultural inputs like seeds and fertilizers.

This helps farmers improve the quality of their products, and helps in obtaining a better price. Each ITC Limited kiosk having Internet access is run by a sanchalak- a trained farmer. The computer is housed in the sanchalak's house and is linked to the Internet via phone lines or by a VSAT connection. Each installation serves an average of 600 farmers in the surrounding ten villages within about a 5 km radius. The sanchalak bears some operating cost but in return earns a service fee for the e-transactions done through his e-Choupal.

Therefore the study was undertaken to explore or determine the awareness about various services offered, Frequency of use, Credibility, Type of services availed, Degree of satisfaction derived and perceived effectiveness of information provided by e-Choupal

METHODOLOGY

In the study ex-post facto research design of social research was used. The study was carried out in purposively selected Gonda district of Uttar Pradesh state. From the selected district four blocks were selected purposively based on the criteria which e Choupal facilitator (Sanchalak) has got the award of best sanchalak award by Jamsetji TATA National Virtual Academy for rural prosperity (NVA). From each block 30 respondents were selected by proportionate sampling method. Thus a total of 120 farmers were selected as a study sample. Structured pre-tested interview schedule was developed and used for data collection. The data were collected with help of personal interview method. For data analysis mean, frequency and percentage statistics were used to draw the meaningful conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Farmer's Awareness about Various Services Offered by E-Choupal

It is clear [Table-1] that 89.16 per cent farmers were aware of purchase of farmers produce (at e-Choupal) followed by 73.33 per cent best package of practices. Farmer's awareness regarding agri-inputs was 72.5 percent followed by market information (65.83%), loan (59.16%), selling consumers good (55.83%), insurance (50.83%), weather information (24.16%), choupal pradarshankhet (55.83%) and question-answers (20.83). The findings were in conformity with the **Annupindi (2003)**, who reported that most of the respondents were aware of different services under e-Choupal which had benefited them by providing more accurate and wide range of information related to crop and market price and trends. **Olaniyi (2013)** revealed that majority the respondents are aware of the potentials and opportunities of ICTs as a means of receiving agricultural information especially on poultry production.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Their Awareness About Various Services Offered by e-Choupal (N=120)

Sl. No.	Services	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Selling consumer good	67	55.83
2.	Loan	71	59.16
3.	Insurance	61	50.83
4.	Best package of practices	88	73.33
5.	Weather information	29	24.16
6.	Market information	79	65.83
7.	Agri-inputs	87	72.50
8.	Purchase farmers produce	107	89.16
9.	Choupal pradarshankhet	67	55.83
10.	Question and answer	25	20.83

(Multiple responses were allowed)

Frequency of Use of E-Choupal

It is evident [Table-2] that 39.16 per cent farmers received information twice in last three months and 30.00 per cent of farmers reported to have got information only once. However, 14.16 per cent of the farmers got information four times and 10.83 per cent got information three times. Only 5.83 per cent respondent's got information more than four times in last three months.

Results presented above are totally dependent on the specific query that the respondents had and number of times he approached to e-Choupal for that particular query. However, it indicates the degree of popularity of e-Choupal amongst the farming community as an alternative source of information.

Table 2: Distribution of the Respondents According to Frequency of Contact (N=120)

Sl. No.	Frequency of Contact (Last Three Months)	Respondents	Percentage
1.	One time	36	30.00
2.	Two times	47	39.16
3.	Three times	13	10.83
4.	Four times	17	14.16
5.	More than four times	7	5.83

Total=100

Credibility of E-Choupal

It is clear [Table-3] that majority of the respondents (66.66%) perceived that the services of e-Choupal are moderately credible, with 33.33 per cent of the respondents perceived the e-Choupal services to be highly credible. As the information provided by the e-Choupal to the respondents is sourced from the authentic and reliable sources, users find them relevant and useful.

Table 3: Distribution of the respondents according to credibility (N=120)

Sl. No.	Credibility	Respondents	Percentage
1.	Highly credible	40	33.33
2.	Moderately credible	80	66.67

Total=100

Services Availed at E-Choupal

The findings revealed[Table 4]that the services 'purchase of agri-produce' had maximum users (47.50%) followed by 'best package of practices' being used by 32.50 per cent respondents. The possible reason behind maximum number of respondents using services 'purchase of agri-produce', it might be that services were beneficial for farmers; they were getting good price for their produce right in the village itself.

Around 14.16 per cent respondents utilized the services named 'Choupal pradarshankhet'under which cultivation is done by farmers under supervision of agronomist and only 9.16 per cent had used agri-input services offered by e-Choupal. Further, 7.50 percent respondents were used question & answer services followed by 5.83 percent usedloan related information' a meagre 2.50 per cent respondent'savailed'insurance related information'. However, it was surprising that none of the respondents were found to be using 'weather information' and 'market price' services of e-Choupal because of irregularity in updating the relevant data. **Jain and Singh (2010)**in their study also found that 91.9 per cent men and 56.3 per cent women respondents were using e- Choupal to access the daily ITC (e-Choupal) procurement rate and the

local mandi rates for various agriculture commodities. In support to such findings **Annamalai and Rao (2003)** stated that services on the website of e-Choupal very popular because it provides localized information at district level and advisories were also available on different aspect.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents on the Basis of Usage of services of E-Choupal (N=120)

Sl. No.	Category (services Availed)	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Loan related information	7	5.83
2.	Insurance related information	3	2.50
3.	Purchase of agri-produce	57	47.50
4.	Best package of practices	39	32.50
5.	Question answers	9	7.50
6.	Choupal pradarshankhet	17	14.16
7.	Agri-inputs	11	9.16

(Multiple responses were allowed)

Degree of Satisfaction Derived by Farmers by Using E-Choupal

It revealed[Table-5]that majority (91.66%) of the respondents were satisfied with the services and facilities provided by e-Choupal. About 49.16 per cent were highly satisfied and 42.50 per cent were moderately satisfied. Only, 8.33 per cent of the respondents were not satisfied by using the services of e-Choupal. It may be therefore concluded that e-Choupal services were highly beneficial for farming community and have been able to meet the information needs of farmers. Further, **Ansari and Yogeshwar (2009)**in their study reported that a large majority of farmers were satisfied with the e-choupal services.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents on the Basis of Degree of Satisfaction by using Services of E-Choupal (N=120)

Sl. No.	Degree of Satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Low	10	8.33
2.	Moderately	51	42.50
3.	Highly	59	49.17

Total=100

Perceived Effectiveness of Information Provided by E-Choupal

It is observed [Table-6] that in respect of information provided by e-Choupal, majority of the respondents (83.33%) had perceived it as effective followed by 10.83 per cent most effective. This indicates that the information provided by e-Choupal was highly effective and meet the needs of the respondents. Only 5.83 per cent respondents had reported that information provided by e-Choupal were less effective. The findings of the present study are in line with the study conducted by **Jain et al. (2011)**.

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents on the Basis of Perceived Effectiveness of Information Provided by EChoupal (N=120)

Sl. No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Least effective (up to 10)	7	5.83
2.	Effective (11 to 16)	100	83.33
3.	Most effective (more than16)	13	10.83
(Mean=13.35, S.D. =2.40 Max=21 Min=9) Total= 100			

CONCLUSIONS

The study indicated that the maximum known serviceutilised by farmers was purchase of farmers produce and majority of the farmers got information twice with in three months, maximum users are satisfied with the services and facilities provided by e-Choupal and information provided by e-Choupal was highly effective and meet the needs of the respondents.e-Choupal has an important role in agriculture information exchange among farmers in Gonda district of Uttar Pradesh. From the study it can be suggested that the further establishment of e-Choupal can be encouraged to reach maximum number of farmers in different states of our country for creating awareness about services provided by it.

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